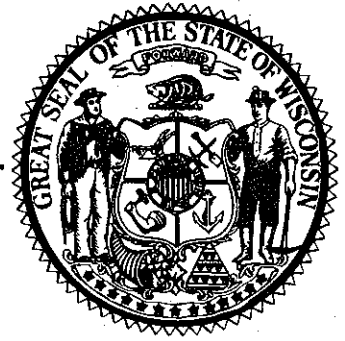


FRED A. RISSER

President
Wisconsin State Senate



Testimony of State Senator Fred Risser on 2007 Senate Bill 6

Wisconsin has a proud history of relatively high voter turnout, especially in election years where there is a presidential or governors race on the ballot. However, voter participation in primary elections is typically very low, between 20 to 25 percent. The non-partisan springtime elections also typically see low voter turnout.

Senate Bill 6 would extend the right to vote to 17 year olds provided they turn 18 by the date of the next general election. My goal is simple: to get more young adults involved in the political process at an earlier age and into the habit of voting.

Under my proposal, an individual who will turn 18 by the time of the next general election, and who meets all other qualifications in order to vote, may vote in a primary election for the selection of candidates to be on the ballot at the general election.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least eight other states permit 17-year-olds to vote in the primary election if the voter will turn 18 by the next general election.

The Wisconsin State Constitution stipulates how certain changes to election laws are handled and implementing this change in voter eligibility would not require a constitutional amendment. However, because the Legislature would be extending voting rights to a new class of people, the state constitution requires that the proposed change be submitted to the voters for their approval.

Many individuals under the age of 18 work, pay taxes and are affected by educational and other policy decisions made by elected officials. Allowing and encouraging those who will be 18 by the general election to vote in the primary election will give them a voice in the entire election cycle. Further, it will hopefully lay the foundation for a lifetime of voting and civic participation.

Thank you.

